NATION

Illegal mining threatening Chambal Sanctuary: SC

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Adani overtakes Ambani to become Asia's richest

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

RCB eye victory over inconsistent Delhi

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 18 APRIL 2026 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 29 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 97 | Pages: 8

Hormuz is open for all: Iran; Trump says US blockade continues

—FREEPIK

TEHRAN/WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

In a major breakthrough, Iran on Friday said that the Strait of Hormuz is "completely open" for all commercial vessels. President Donald Trump welcomed the move, but said the US' naval blockade against Iran will remain in "full force" until Tehran reaches an agreement with the Washington to end the war.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on X that the decision to open the Strait "for all commercial vessels.. for the remaining period of the ceasefire (with the US)" comes "in line with (Israel's) ceasefire in Lebanon".

Araghchi, however, said the ships must sail "on the coordinated route as already announced" by the Iran Ports and Maritime Organisation.

Iran effectively blocked the Strait after being attacked by the US and Israel. Nearly a fifth of the world's oil once passed through the crucial waterway.

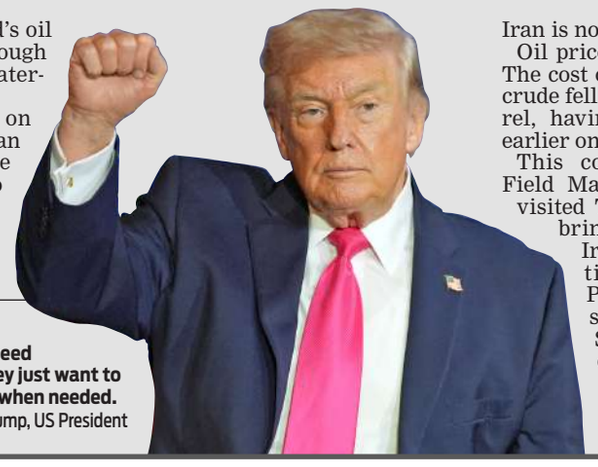
Trump said on Truth Social Iran and the US are working to remove all sea mines from the Strait. He added the deal with Iran is not tied to Lebanon.

Oil prices then plummeted. The cost of a barrel of Brent crude fell to $88 dollars a barrel, having been above $98 earlier on Friday.

This comes as Pakistani Field Marshal Asim Munir visited Tehran in hopes of bringing the US and Iran back to the negotiating table. A Pakistani official said Iran opened the Strait as a "confidence-building measure ahead of more talk". —*PTI*

>>>*Pgs, 6, 7*

"Now that the Hormuz Strait situation is over, I received a call from NATO asking if we would need some help. I told them to stay away, unless they just want to load up their ships with oil. They were useless when needed. A paper tiger
—Donald Trump, US President



Harivansh re-elected as RS Deputy Chairman

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Nominated member Harivansh was elected unopposed as Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman on Friday for a third consecutive term. Harivansh was elected after a motion, moved by the Leader of the House, JP Nadda and seconded by S Phangnon Konyak, to elect him as deputy chairman, was adopted with a voice vote. A total of five motions were moved for electing Harivansh as the deputy chairman. "I declare that Harivansh ji has been chosen as the deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha," Chairman CP Radhakrishnan said after the motion was adopted unanimously. —*PTI*

>>>*MORE ON PAGE 3*

Congress MLA Kulkarni gets lifer in BJP murder case

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

A Bengaluru court on Friday sentenced Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni to life imprisonment in the BJP leader Yogeshgouda Goudar murder case. The court also sentenced 16 others convicted in connection with the case to life imprisonment. On Wednesday, Santhosh Gajanan Bhat, the Judge of the Special Court for cases involving elected representatives, convicted Kulkarni and others under IPC sections, including criminal conspiracy and murder. The case pertains to the killing of Goudar, a BJP zilla panchayat member, in Dharwad on 15 June, 2016 by hired assailants. —*PTI*

>>>*MORE ON PAGE 2*

Plea in HC seeks cancellation of Suvendu's poll bid

KOLKATA, 17 APRIL

A public interest litigation has been filed in the Calcutta High Court seeking cancellation of BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's candidature for the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections over alleged anti-secular remarks. The petition, filed by Soumo Mondal, urges the ECI and authorities to act on complaints and revoke his candidature, Bar and Bench stated. It cites a 3 March rally near Bhawanipore where he allegedly called secularism "unacceptable" and said he was "an MLA of Hindus." The plea argues these statements threaten communal harmony and violate the Constitution. —*AGENCIES*

Constitution Amendment Bill fails to pass LS test

Bill sought to increase women's quota, carry out delimitation

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

In a major setback to the government, a Constitution Amendment Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women and carry out the delimitation exercised was defeated in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

The bill required a two-third majority – or 352 votes out of the 528 – to pass, but only 298 members voted for the bill and 230 MPs voted against it.

According to the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, Lok Sabha seats were to be increased to 816 from the current 543 to "operationalise" the women's reservation law before the 2029 parliamentary polls, following a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census. Seats were also to be increased in state and Union territory assemblies to accommodate 33 per cent reservation for women.

However, Opposition parties said that the delimitation exercise would favour North Indian states and severely impact the South and the North East.

This was the first time a bill under the Modi government was defeated in Parliament.

NDA FUMES

When the Constitution Amendment Bill was defeated, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju conveyed to Speaker Om Birla that the government has no intention to move ahead with the two other bills -- the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill -- as both were interlinked with the Constitution Amendment Bill.

"We will not take rest till we ensure that the country's women get reservation in legislatures," he said.

Home Minister Amit Shah blamed the Opposition.

"Now, the women of the country will not get the 33 per cent reservation in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies," he said on X. "Their (Congress') mindset is neither in the interest of women nor of the country."

He said that there are 127 seats where there are more than 20 lakh voters and it goes against the spirit of the principle of 'one person, one vote and one value'.

During the debate, LoP Rahul Gandhi said that the bill was redrawing the political map of India, and accused the government of hiding behind women.

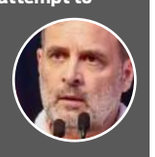
"What is being attempted here is a bypass of the caste census. They are trying to avoid giving power, representation to my OBC brothers and sisters, and instead take power away from them," Gandhi said. —*PTI*

BJP MPs and others raise protest, after the Constitution Amendment Bill failed to get enough votes in the Lok Sabha on Friday —*PTI*

AYES	298
NOES	230
ABSTAIN	0
VOTED	528

"Even after so many decades of independence, it is not right that women in India have such limited representation in (legislative bodies)... For nearly four decades, this issue has been delayed
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

"This (bill) is an attempt to change the country's electoral map, using and hiding behind India's women... You (govt) are scared of the erosion of your strength, and you are trying to rejig the Indian political map. (It is an) anti-national act
—Rahul Gandhi, LoP in LS



All the members of the INDIA group clearly opposed women's reservation.... In a way, those opposing delimitation are also opposing the increase in SC and ST seats
—Amit Shah, Home Minister

Flames and smoke billow after a car and bus collide head-on, in Yadgir, Karnataka on —*PTI*

9 burnt alive in Yadgir as car, bus collide head-on

YADGIR, 17 APRIL

Nine people of a family, including four children, were burnt alive when a car and a bus collided head-on near Shantapura Cross in Surpur taluk on Friday. Both vehicles were gutted.

"The accident occurred at around 9.45am near Devapura. The car, travelling from Yadgiri towards Raichur, attempted to overtake another vehicle and hit the bus," SP Shankar said.

Both vehicles were driving rashly.

The deceased are Krishna Nayak, 52; Anantha Kala Krishna, 45; Sharanappa, 36; Nisarga Sharanappa, 30; Shashikala, 30; and four children, all residents of Sirwar in Raichur district.

The car was driven by Krishna Nayak, a Sirwar Town Panchayat member. The family was returning after darshan at the Venugopala Swamy temple in Surpur.

The impact made the bus skid and a fire broke out in front of the bus, which spread to the car. Krishna Nayak, Sharanappa, and a child were charred to death. The accident was so severe that skulls were found inside the car.

Circle Police Inspector M Umesh told Salar News that passengers in the car were trapped as the vehicle's doors could not be opened. Locals tried to help but the fire spread rapidly. About 25 to 30 passengers were on the bus and escaped safely, although some sustained injuries.

Shashikala's son is the lone survivor from the cars. — *Salar News*

Get your act together: Minister warns hospitals

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Karnataka Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil on Friday warned hospital directors across the state of strict departmental action over persistent complaints regarding drug shortages, inadequate ICU capacity and poor sanitations in State-run-hospitals managed by them.

His warning came at a departmental review meeting at the Vikasa Soudha chaired by him. Patil referred to the Lokayukta's observations and widespread public complaints regarding drug availability at hospitals functioning under medical education department.

Pulling up hospital heads for reactive drug procurement practices, he directed all government hospital and college heads to initiate procurement tenders at least three months in advance of anticipated shortages

On acute complaints about ICU bed, Patil sought a direct explanation from the head of the trauma and emergency care centre at Victoria Hospital. He also directed designating an entire floor of the upcoming 10-storey Victoria Hospital building for additional ICU beds. —*PTI*

Govt drops mandate on Aadhaar app in phone

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Centre has decided not to go ahead with a proposal to require phone companies to pre-install biometric identification app Aadhaar on phones, a state body said on Friday, according to a Reuters report.

UIDAI, the state body that operates Aadhaar, had asked the IT Ministry in January to engage with Apple, Google and other leading smartphone makers to consider mandatory pre-installation of the Aadhaar app, according to the report.

However, the IT Ministry "is not in favour of mandating the pre-installation of the Aadhaar App on smartphones," UIDAI said in a statement to Reuters on Friday.

It did not elaborate on the reasons.

The Aadhaar request was the sixth time in two years the government has sought pre-installation of state apps on phones. However, smartphone makers flagged concerns about device security and compatibility when they received the proposal, and said it would increase costs.

While the government maintains Aadhaar is safe and secure, it has faced persistent criticism from privacy advocates, including for data leaks where personal details of millions of holders surfaced on the dark web. —*Agencies*

Courts can examine religion: SC on Sabarimala row

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Observing that denominational practices can be subject to judicial scrutiny, the Supreme Court on Friday said that judges must rise above personal religious beliefs. Stating that while adjudicating matters of faith, judges must be guided by freedom of conscience and the broader constitutional framework.

The nine-Judge Bench made these remarks while hearing petitions concerning the discrimination against women at religious sites—including the Sabarimala temple in Keralam—and the broader scope of religious freedom across faiths.

Senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for an intervenor, told the Supreme Court the reference goes beyond Hindu practices or the Sabarimala case, stating that "When we say freedom of conscience we mean the freedom to challenge anything—the State or religion." —*PTI*

Noida protests again over wages; Oppn blocked from rallies

NOIDA, 17 APRIL

Police stopped a Samajwadi Party delegation led by Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey at the DND Flyway as it headed to meet protesting factory workers, prompting SP and CPI(M) leaders to stage a sit-in. Pandey alleged injustice against workers, claiming a lathi charge followed protests over unpaid wages and long-standing labour exploitation. He accused the labour department of failing to address grievances. CPI(M) general secretary MA Baby said there was no confirmation on the release of detained workers and alleged police excesses. Police maintained the situation is largely normal after recent violence, with a wage hike and committee. —*ANI*

AFTER MISSING CASES

Guides must for trekking in K'taka

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Friday announced that trekking on any forest department-approved route will no longer be permitted without a certified nature guide equipped with GPS-enabled walkie-talkies.

As per a new safety Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for trekkers, every group must have at least one local nature guide for every 10 participants, with a maximum of 150 trekkers per batch on any route. Online registration is now mandatory.

The SOP was introduced following recent incidents — including a woman from Keralam who went missing for three days at Tadiandamol hill in Kodagu, and a minor girl who went missing and was later found dead in Chikkamagaluru.

Before a trek begins, trekkers will be briefed on distance, duration, and local conditions, including how to respond if they encounter wildlife. Loud devices, sharp metal objects, weapons, and campfires are strictly prohibited. Trekkers must carry back their waste and dispose of it only at base camps. Minors must carry a consent letter, and senior citizens a fitness certificate. — *PTI*

Vinay Kulkarni gets lifer for murdering BJP leader Goudar

He faces disqualification as MLA

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

A Bengaluru court on Friday sentenced Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni to life imprisonment in the BJP leader Yogeshgouda Goudar murder case. The court also sentenced 15 others convicted in connection with the case to life imprisonment.

The case pertains to the killing of Goudar, a BJP zilla panchayat member, in Dharwad on 15 June, 2016. Kulkarni was a minister at that time. Hired assailants attacked and hacked Goudar to death in his gym at Saptapur in Dharwad. The BJP government in 2019 handed the case over to the CBI in 2019 and Kulkarni was arrested by the agency in 2020. His lengthy trial included a series of bail requests – some of which were approved.

On Wednesday, Santhosh Gajanan Bhat, the Judge of the Special Court for cases involving elected representatives, convicted Kulkarni and others under IPC sections, including criminal conspiracy and murder.

CBI advocate Hema stated that the central agency filed a chargesheet against 21 people in connection with the case.

Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni is convicted of killing Yogeshgouda Goudar, a BJP zila panchayat member, in Dharwad on 15 June 2016 —PTI

Speaking to reporters on Friday, she said: "The accused persons will remain in jail until their death".

Another accused, who was the circle inspector of police, was charged with destroying evidence and screening the offender, the advocate added. "He was given 7 years of rigorous imprisonment."

Hema said the court imposed a total fine of about Rs 12.50 lakh and awarded Rs 16 lakh in compensation to the victims' children and brother Gurunath Goudar.

She said the main challenge in this case was that many witnesses were threatened "not to tell the truth."

Kulkarni faces disqualification as an MLA following this sentencing, official sources said.

According to advocates, approver evidence, eyewitness evidence, CDRs, tower locations, and CCTV footage were key evidence for the case.

Another CBI advocate said the accused persons will have to spend time in jail until their natural death. The government holds the power of remission after 14 years. —PTI

Siddaramaiah is helpless: Rajanna

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is "helpless" and under some "compulsion", said Congress MLA KN Rajanna amid claims that his confidants are being targeted within the ruling party.

Rajana, considered close to Siddaramaiah, said that the Chief Minister is not standing up to defend his aides as the Congress took action against minority community leaders – also considered close to the CM – after the Davangere South bypolls.

Rajanna himself was sacked from the Karnataka Cabinet last August, after his criticism of party leader Rahul Gandhi's "vote theft" charge.

"There will be vested interests in the party who will try to conspire against those who have been loyal to the party and want the party to grow for the welfare of the people," he told press in the City on Friday. "Nothing can be done about it. What we expect from our Chief Minister is that when such a situation arises, he should stand strong. But he is not."

"We did not expect such a helpless situation from Siddaramaiah," he added.

When asked who had made Siddaramaiah helpless, Rajana said, "I won't say who, you understand it yourself".

The Congress recently suspended MLC K Abdul Jabbar from the party's primary membership and relieved MLC Naseer Ahmed from his position as the CM's political secretary amid a row over Muslims during the Davangere bypolls.

RAJANNA ATTACKS DKS OVER DOUBLE STANDARDS

Rajana also took an apparent dig at Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar by citing a Kanada proverb which said that there is no punishment for the mistakes committed by the King.

"Does sharing a stage with a person (referring to Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev) who said, 'Who is Rahul Gandhi? I don't know,' not amount to indiscipline?"he remarked. Rajanna also said that "this person... goes there and compliments Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for arrangements made for the Kumbh Mela. He also goes to Ambani family marriage, while Rahul Gandhi did not even accept the invitation."

> **I don't have any personal involvement in this. People may blame me; I am not concerned... Decisions regarding MLAs or MLCs cannot be taken at the State level without instructions from Delhi**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

He added that he was not calling for action to be taken against Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar.

Rajana noted that late Davangere MLA Shamanur Shivashankarappa campaigned for the BJP candidate BY Raghavandra during the Shivamogga Lok Sabha polls but no action was taken. "The same people were at the helm then (referring to Shivakumar as KPCC chief)." —PTI

JARKIHOLI MEETS DKS ON CONGRESS SUSPENSIONS

PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi met DyCM DK Shivakumar on Friday after expressing concern that disciplinary action against minority leaders may send the wrong message. "(Suspended MLC) Abdul Jabbar's issue was discussed... He should be brought back into the party; he is also our leader. His reply is essential," Jarkiholi told press about the meeting. Separately, Shivakumar dismissed reports that there was factionalism in the party. "Where is my faction? Has anyone put up a board saying they belong to the Siddaramaiah faction?"

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi—SALAR

Ousted Harihar mutt seer files caveat plea

DAVANGERE, 17 APRIL

The dispute between **Vachanand Swamiji** of the Harihar Veerashaiva Lingayat Panchamasali Guru Peetha and the Dharmadarshi trust board has intensified, with both sides taking firm positions.

Despite being expelled by the Panchamasali Peetha, the seer has refused to vacate the mutt premises. He alleged that his removal was part of a conspiracy after he raised questions about the trust's financial dealings. "I will not leave the mutt under any circumstances. I will seek justice through legal means," he said, adding that he has filed a caveat petition in a Davangere court.

Trustee HS Nagaraj, however, accused the seer of misusing Rs 2 crore donated by industrialist Murugesh Nirani two years ago for personal purposes. He questioned the Swamiji's interference in financial matters handled by the trust and warned that he should vacate the premises by 23 April or face possible eviction by devotees.

The trust also alleged misconduct involving hostel students and is considering approaching Child Welfare authorities with a formal complaint. —*Salar News*

LEFT HIGH AND DRY

Autorickshaws queue up near a fuel station on Mysuru Road amid LPG crisis in Bengaluru on Friday -MOHAMMED ASAD

Mysuru DC warns dealers against hoarding fertilisers

MYSURU, 17 APRIL

Mysuru's Deputy Commissioner Lakshmikanth Reddy on Friday warned fertilizer dealers against putting pressure on farmers to buy other products when they come to purchase essential ones like urea.

He said this during a meeting with the heads of agricultural equipment supplier organizations, fertilizer shops owners, seeds distributors and the officials at the Zilla Panchayat hall.

Reddy said fertilizer suppliers must follow the agriculture department guidelines to ensure that farmers do not face any shortage of urea. They should not force farmers to buy bio-stimulants, other products along with subsidized fertilizers like complex, DAP, Muriate of Potash, Zinc and other fertilizers, he added.

Both retailers and fertilizer shops license holders must share the information regarding urea and DAP stock after downloading their rake in their shops with the office of joint director compulsorily on a regular basis, he said.

He also asked both retailers and dealers to share information of urea and DAP stock to Karnataka State Seeds Corporation, involved in the distribution of chemicals buffer stocks to ensure availability of fertilizers to farmers during peak kharif cycle that is expected to begin from the week of June. —*Salar News*

Shivamogga: Minor held for vandalising murder victim's grave

SHIVAMOGGA, 17 APRIL

Police arrested a minor for allegedly vandalising the grave of Sanketh, an SSLC student who was earlier beaten to death by a group of juveniles while trying to stop a fight.

The juveniles are currently in custody in connection with Sanketh's murder.

The incident of grave vandalism came to light on 31 March, when Sanketh's memorial, built by his family was found destroyed. The structure had been smashed and granite slabs were broken, the family, subsequently filed a complaint at the Tunganagar police.

Following a probe, police tracked down and apprehended the minor accused.

Sanketh was killed on 23 February on the outskirts of Shivamogga. He had reportedly rushed to rescue his friend Girish, who was assaulted by a group.

The attackers then turned on Sanketh, leaving him critically injured. He succumbed to his injuries on the way to a private hospital. —*Salar News*

Leopard enters house in Mysuru, captured by forest department

MYSURU, 17 APRIL

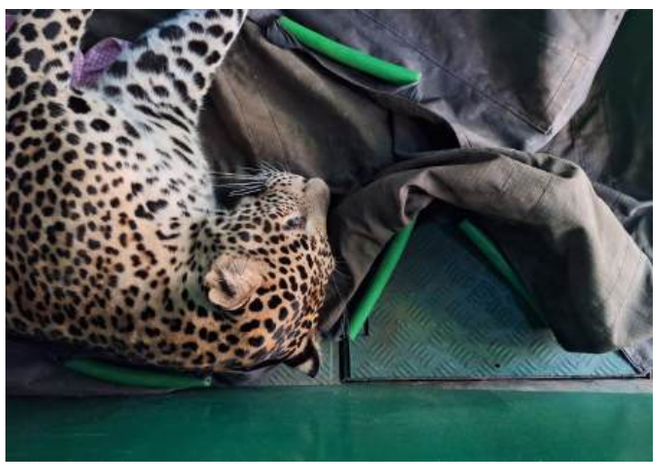
A three year old leopard was captured by forest department officials from a house in Siddarthanagar after it strayed into a room in the house belonging to Suresh of the area in Mysuru, officials said.

The big cat entered into the bedroom of Shyalaja, mother in law of Suresh in the morning in Siddarthanagar from nearby neighbourhood Chamundi Hills.

Although Sujatha, wife of Suresh, his mother-in-law Shyalaja were present in the house, no one was attacked by the big cat.

On being informed by the residents of the area, forest department officials rushed to the spot along with veterinarians, other staff, and captured the animal by tranquilizing it.

Forest department officials said that a big cat slipped through nearby Chamundi Hills and entered into the house room of Suresh, hiding under a bed. The leopard will be released back into the forest after the first aid and carrying out all other necessary procedures. —*Salar News*



A three-year-old leopard was captured after straying into a house in Siddarthanagar, Mysuru —SALAR

INDIA'S FIRST: BWSSB GETS ISO 50001 CERTIFICATION

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

The BWSSB on Friday said it has achieved a historic milestone by becoming "the first water utility" in India to receive the internationally recognised ISO 50001:2018 certification.

In a statement, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board said the certification, issued on 14 April by Bureau Veritas, recognises the board's robust energy management systems.

The certification specifically acknowledges BWSSB's operation and maintenance of its bulk water supply pumping stations at three key locations—TK Halli, Harohalli and Tataguni—meeting international standards.

It also covers critical support functions at the head office in Cauvery Bhavan, as well as the continuous supply of water across the Greater Bengaluru area.

BWSSB conferred ISO certification by Bureau Veritas, recognising the board's robust energy management systems. —BWSSB

Earlier in the day, BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar, along with senior officials, met Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and formally presented the certificate, expressing gratitude for his support and guidance.

Shivakumar called it a "a significant milestone that reflects the government's commitment to building a world-class and sustainable water infrastructure for Bengaluru."

"By efficiently managing large-scale bulk water supply systems, BWSSB is setting a national benchmark while ensuring reliable and uninterrupted water services to millions. This milestone advances our vision of transforming Bengaluru into a future-ready, climate-resilient global metropolis," he added.—*PTI*

AT ELECTRONICS CITY

B'luru to get AI Centre of Excellence

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Karnataka government has approved the establishment of an AI Centre of Excellence in Biotechnology at IBAB (Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnolog) in Electronics City (Phase 1) here.

The decision was taken by the State Cabinet on Thursday night. It marks a significant step towards strengthening the State's leadership in emerging technologies and in IT and biotechnology, Minister for IT and Biotechnology Priyank Kharge said on Friday.

The centre will come up over the next four years with a total outlay of Rs 20 crore, in partnership with the Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnology and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP), according to a statement from the minister's office.

"This Centre of Excellence will strengthen our research ecosystem, accelerate innovation and enable Karnataka to lead in high-impact next-generation technologies," the minister said.

The minister said the Cabinet has also approved the transfer of a 51 per cent stake in the Karnataka Technology & Innovation Museum Foundation (KTIMF) to the Unboxing BLR Foundation.

Speaking on the side-lines of a Bengaluru Tech Summit (BTS) 2026 curtain-raiser in Delhi, Kharge, said this year's summit from 17-19 November is themed 'AI and Beyond'. —*PTI*

AGAINST BILL

Mahila Morcha president Sowmya Reddy leads protest against Women's Reservation Bill at KPCC office in Bengaluru on Friday. —MOHAMMED ASAD

CLASSIFIED

CLOSING DOWN OFFER
RAYMOND DISCOUNT SHOP
BUY ONE TAKE ONE FREE
RAYMONDS
T/W Pant Pc (1.30)
LINEN SHIRT PC (2.50)
SAFARI SUIT PC
3 Pc SUIT LENGTHS
CMBO GIFT BOX
AT NEW M.N. Next to K.F.C
DISPENSARY Rd. OFF COMMERCIAL
BANGALORE-1 Mob: 9343 03 7218

Suvendu says IPAC issuing fake press IDs to TMC workers

Says only genuine scribes be allowed near polling station, writes to ECI

BJP leader Suvndu Adhikari said the pseudo-journalists are strategically placed to carry out illegal activities at the local level *PHOTO: PTI*

KOLKATA, 17 APRIL

West Bengal Assembly Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Friday wrote to the Election Commission of India (ECI), flagging what he claimed was a "grave conspiracy" allegedly being orchestrated by TMC in collaboration with I-PAC, aimed at "subverting the democratic process".

In a post on X, Adhikari alleged that IPAC is "systematically issuing Fake Press Identification Cards to TMC party workers," claiming that individuals who are not journalists are being disguised as members of the media to gain unrestricted access to sensitive areas.

"These 'pseudo-journalists' are being strategically placed to carry out illegal activities at the local level under the guise of media immunity," he added.

Calling it a "classic playbook strategy of the TMC," Adhikari alleged "misuse of the privilege of the press card that grants mobility and access which ordinary party workers do not have."

In light of these allegations, he urged the ECI to conduct a "rigorous verification of all newly issued Press Identification Cards and accreditation letters issued within the last couple of months across West Bengal," and to direct district administrations and police authorities to monitor and scrutinise credentials of individuals claiming to be journalists without a verifiable professional track record in the field.

He also demanded that only journalists from "recognised and established media houses" be permitted near polling stations, following secondary verification of their credentials.

I-T Dept raids TMC MLA's properties

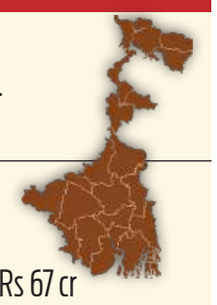
The Income Tax Department on Friday conducted searches at two premises linked to TMC MLA Debasish Kumar, who is seeking a re-election from the Rashbehari seat in south Kolkata. Simultaneous searches were conducted at his house on Manoharpukur Road and his election office. The reason behind the searches was not known. Kumar had recently been summoned multiple times by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a land fraud case. The ED aimed to know whether Kumar had any financial transactions with businessman Amit Gangopadhyay. *—PTI*

Polling in West Bengal will be held in two phases on 23 and 29 April, with the results of the Assembly elections scheduled to be announced on 4 May.

While TMC seeks a fourth consecutive term in the state BJP aims to form the government. *—ANI*

WB POLL CANDIDATES REPORT ASSET SURGE

Several of the candidates of Phase – 1 of the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections have reported a surge in their assets since 2021. Given below is a list of candidates with their net worth.



JAKIR HOSSAIN
TMC, Jangipur candidate
ASSETS:
Rose to Rs 133 cr from Rs 67 cr

SUDIP KUMAR MUKHERJEE
BJP, Purulia MLA & candidate
ASSETS:
Rose to Rs 11 cr from Rs 45 lakh

KRISHNA KALYANI
TMC, Raiganj MLA & candidate
ASSETS:
Rose to Rs 20 cr from Rs 5.8 cr

MANAS RANJAN BHUNIA
TMC, Sabang candidate
ASSETS:
Rose to Rs 15 cr from Rs 7 cr

SUVENDU ADHIKARI
Leader of Opposition, BJP Nandigram and Bhabanipur candidate
ASSETS:
Rose to Rs 17.38 lakh from Rs 8.13 lakh

'Delimitation will be political demonetisation'

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP for Thiruvananthapuram, criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to connect women's reservation with the expansion of Parliament, calling it a gift wrapped in "barbed wire".

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Tharoor argued that delimitation should be deferred, emphasising the need for extensive stakeholder consultation.

He said, "Linking women's reservation with delimitation is to hold the aspirations of Indian women hostage to one of the most contentious and complex exercises in the country's history."

Tharoor urged the government to pass the Women's Reservation Bill independently, stating support if it was decoupled from delimitation, which he described as "fraught with complications that could tear at our federal fabric". He warned that haste in delimitation is akin to "demonetisation", which caused damage, and called it "political demonetisation".

Tharoor highlighted fault-lines such as the balance between small and large states, and the economic contributions of different regions. He criticised the 50 per cent formula of Home Minister Amit Shah. He warned expanding the Lok Sabha seats without increasing the Rajya Sabha risks imbalance. *—PTI*

—ANI

Abhishek Banerjee slams BJP for TMC worker's abuse

KOLKATA, 17 APRIL

Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee on Friday alleged that BJP supporters abused a woman party worker in front of her two-year-old daughter in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district. Banerjee stated that former CPI(M) workers now with the BJP targeted Sathi Gorai Kuila in Sabang. While one person has been arrested, Banerjee expressed hope that the Election Commission would bring all those named in the FIR on the "heinous attack" to face consequences. The senior TMC leader accused the BJP of cash inducements, urging voters to take the money but vote against it. West Bengal Assembly elections will be held in two phases on 23 and 29 April. Votes will be counted on 4 May. *—PTI*

'Jana Nayagan' leak: Asst editor, 2 others held

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

The Tamil Nadu Cyber Crime Wing has arrested three main accused, including a freelance assistant editor, for data theft and leaking Vijay's movie 'Jana Nayagan' online. According to an official release, the arrests were made on Wednesday following the prior apprehension of six other individuals on 11 April for uploading pirated content. Police stated on Thursday that the primary accused was working as a freelance assistant editor for another film. The accused stole the film's data from an editing studio, rendered it into a movie format, and shared it with the co-accused, resulting in its online circulation. All the three accused were produced before a court and remanded to judicial custody. *—PTI*

HC orders FIR against Rahul in citizenship case

LUCKNOW, 17 APRIL

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court on Friday directed the registration of an FIR against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi in connection with an alleged dual citizenship controversy. The court also said the state government may seek the assistance of a central agency to investigate the matter.The order was passed a petition filed by S Vignesh Shishir, who had challenged an order of a special MP/MLA court rejecting his plea for an FIR against Gandhi. The petitioner, a BJP worker from Karnataka, had sought a an FIR against Gandhi and a detailed probe into the matter, levelling allegations against Gandhi under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Official Secrets Act,Foreigners Act and the Passport Act. *—PTI*

BJP MP accused of inciting Amravati communal violence

NAGPUR/AMRAVATI, 17 APRIL

Maharashtra State Minority Commission Chief Pyare Khan accused BJP MP Navneet Rana of deliberately trying to incite communal violence in Amravati. Khan's remarks follow a case involving obscene videos of minor girls circulating on social media. Eight arrests have been made since the videos surfaced on 11 April, although no victims have filed complaints. Khan alleged that Rana is intentionally provoking Hindu-Muslim conflict and called for strict action against leaders spreading rumours. Khan demanded Rana's expulsion from the BJP. Khan said he will write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He also said he met some of the victims' parents. *—PTI*

FOREIGN EXCHANGE VIOLATION

ED raids Punjab minister Sanjeev Arora, others

NEW DELHI/LUDHIANA, 17 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday conducted searches at premises of Punjab industries minister **Sanjeev Arora**, his son and some others as part of a foreign exchange violation probe linked to alleged insider trading in stock markets and round-tripping of betting funds from UAE to India, officials said.

A total of 13 residential and official premises in Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Gurugram and Chandigarh are being covered under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

This includes the residences and offices of Arora, his real estate company Hampton Sky Realty Ltd (formerly Ritesh Properties and Industries Ltd) and that of Arora's son Kavya Arora (MD of the said realty company) in Ludhiana, the officials said.

The premises of Hemanth Sood, who runs a financial investment and stock broker company named Findoc Finvest Private Ltd., in the same city and that of Jalandhar-based businessman and alleged bookie Chandra Shekhar Aggarwal were also covered.

- A total of 13 premises in Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Gurugram and Chandigarh are being covered under Foreign Exchange Management Act.

Meanwhile, in Chandigarh, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann slammed the Centre in the wake of the ED raids, saying democracy was being 'murdered by harassing only non-BJP governments.'

Mann alleged the Centre was using agencies like ED and CBI as weapons and in 'preparations' for the Assembly polls in the state in 2027. *—PTI*

DMK rules out RaGa, Stalin joint campaign

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

The DMK on Friday said senior Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** and Chief Minister **MK Stalin** will not campaign together for the 23 April polls in Tamil Nadu as both leaders have separate schedules.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi will visit Chennai on Saturday to launch his election campaign. Congress is contesting from 28 seats as part of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA).

DMK Organising Secretary RS Bharathi said that "Rahul Gandhi will campaign in one area, while the chief minister will campaign in another."

He stated that neither Stalin, the DMK president, nor Rahul had the time to campaign together, noting that their pre-existing travel schedules precluded such an arrangement.

Bharathi was responding to a question regarding BJP leader K Annamalai's earlier claim that "Rahul Gandhi wishes for the DMK -led alliance to lose in Tamil Nadu and, therefore, will not come to the state to campaign."

The DMK leader claimed with only a few days remaining until the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, support for the DMK alliance is surging. He alleged that that the Election Commission is operating as the BJP's "B Team" across the entire country.

- Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi will visit Chennai to launch his election campaign. Congress is contesting from 28 seats as part of the DMK-led alliance.

He said that a complaint had been lodged with the EC regarding BJP members going door-to-door to collect personal details under the guise of distributing sample cheques worth Rs 10,000. Bharathi alleged that AIADMK members are distributing pamphlets resembling vouchers, promising a payout of Rs 10,000 in lines with a poll assurance. *—PTI*

DRAVIDIAN MAJORS TO CONTEST IN CHEPAUK-THIRUVALLIKENI

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

The electoral contest in Chennai's Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni constituency appears to be narrowing to a straight fight between the DMK youth wing chief Udhayanidhi Stalin and AIADMK veteran Adhi Rajaram.

Udhayanidhi, Tamil Nadu's Deputy Chief Minister, seeks re-election from a seat once held by his grandfather, the late M Karunanidhi. The particular seat was also previously won by his father Chief Minister of the state MK Stalin.

The constituency remains a DMK bastion, having elected DMK candidates in recent elections.

Adhi Rajaram, 67, aims to end DMK's dominance, asserting, "I will win by a huge vote margin and end the family rule in this constituency, which has not seen real development since the last five years."

He previously contested from Thousand Lights against MK Stalin in 2006. Udhayanidhi campaigns as "Grandson of M Karunanidhi, son of M K Stalin," appealing to voters as "your 'chella pillai' for a decisive DMK victory."

The election on 23 April also features candidates from TVK and Naam Tamilar Katchi. The results will be announced on 4 May.

The constituency, which is home to Marina Beach and MA Chidambaram Stadium, has 163,866 voters. Udhayanidhi won his debut in 2021 by a margin of 69,355 votes. *—PTI*

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin interacts with a child during his campaign for DMK candidates in Udumalaipettai, Valparai and Pollachi constituencies in Tiruppur on Friday *—PTI*

HIMANTA'S WIFE PASSPORT ROW

SC refuses to shield Pawan Khera from arrest

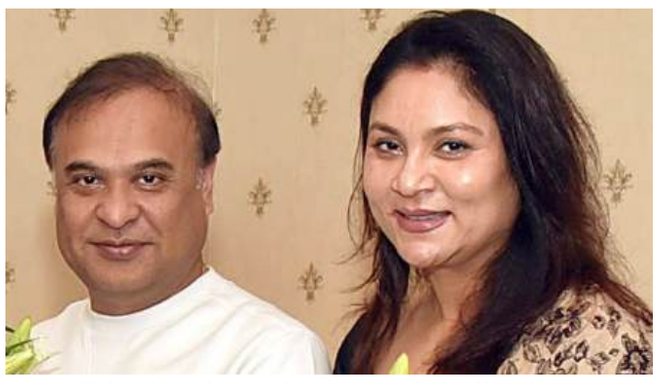
NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain Congress leader **Pawan Khera**'s plea seeking protection from arrest till 20 April in a case lodged against him for claiming Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possesses multiple passports.

The top court asked Khera to move a court of competent jurisdiction in Assam for anticipatory bail in the case, without taking note of adverse remarks, if any, made by it and the Telangana High Court.

Khera had alleged that Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, has multiple passports and foreign property, which were not declared in Sarma's affidavit for the Assembly polls in the state.

Sarma and his wife have rejected the allegations as false and fabricated.



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma with his wife and entrepreneur Riniki Bhuyan in Guwahati, (below)Pawan Khera *—ANI*

SC earlier took note of the Assam government's plea and stayed the Telangana High Court's order granting Khera one-week transit anticipatory bail in the case.

Its two successive orders may enable the Assam Police to take coercive measures against the Congress leader.

This bench was persuaded to pass an ex-parte order, he said, adding that the transit bail granted by the Telangana High Court was expiring on Friday and the Gauhati High Court opens on Monday.

Khera's counsel sought protection for a few days to enable him to approach the Gauhati High Court with the anticipatory-bail plea.

The court said Khera's pre-arrest bail plea "shall be considered on its own merits.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Assam government, referred to alleged suppression of facts by Khera in his pre-arrest bail plea before the Telangana High Court.

Mehta said it is a case of lack of territorial jurisdiction and there is no averment in Khera's plea as to why he had moved the Telangana High Court.

The case against Khera was registered at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under various sections. *—PTI*

'Harivansh's win as Deputy Chair affirms trust in him'

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Rajya Sabha Chairman **CP Radhakrishnan o**n Friday said the unopposed election of **Harivansh** as Deputy Chairman of the Upper House is a 'resounding affirmation' of the confidence and trust he enjoys across party lines.

He congratulated Harivansh on his election as deputy chairman for the third term and wished him every success during his tenure.

A nominated member and journalist turned politician, it will be Harivansh's third term as Deputy Chairman in the Rajya Sabha.

The Chairman termed the re-election of Harivansh to the high constitutional office for the third consecutive time as a rare distinction.

He said the newly elected members would find in Harivansh a guide and a source of inspiration in understanding the nuances, conventions and responsibilities that come with parliamentary functioning.

The opposition Trinamool Congress (TMC) however took exception to Harivansh's election. The party's Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien questioned the "rush" in appointing Harivansh and pointed out that Lok Sabha has not had a deputy speaker in seven years.

Both TMC and Samajwadi Party members staged a walkout as a resolution for the election of nominated MP Harivansh as deputy chairman was taken up. This is the first time a nominated MP has been appointed deputy chairman of the Upper House. *—PTI*

Mob attacks Assam foresters after encroachers' arrest

KOKRAJHAR/GUWAHATI, 17 APRIL

A mob injured forest staff and vandalised the Runikhata range office in Assam's Chirang district after they detained some people over alleged forest encroachment. The crowd ransacked the office and set fire to government vehicles near the Bhutan border. Police responded to restore order as locals blocked roads with furniture and stones. Tensions arose after officials detained locals on Thursday for illegal forest clearing in the Ripu–Chirang Reserve Forest. The mob demanded their release, claiming that the staff had assaulted them, injuring two women. Authorities urged villagers to submit complaints, warning that roadblocks and property damage are unacceptable. —PTI

—ANI

Loan app booked for Keralam BDS student's death

KANNUR, 17 APRIL

Police filed an extortion case against an online loan app in Kerala, alleging it mentally harassed and intimidated first-year BDS student Nithin Raj R L, leading to his death. The app allegedly used intimidation to recover a Rs 15,000 loan at 36 per cent interest, violating laws. The FIR, filed at Chakkarakkallu police station on 16 April, cites section 308 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The student was found critically injured after falling from a building on 10 April and died later. Police have also registered cases against two faculty members for alleged harassment over caste and complexion, who remain untraced. —PTI

I honked, says MP BJP MLA's son after injuring 5 with SUV

SHIVPURI, 17 APRIL

Five people were injured in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri after an SUV allegedly driven by a BJP MLA's son hit them on Thursday, police said. Dinesh Lodhi, son of Pichhore MLA Pritam Lodhi, was driving his Mahindra Thar. It first hit a motorcycle, injuring Sanjay, Ashish and Anshul Parihar. The car also hit two women, Sita Verma and Pooja Soni. Sanjay suffered serious injuries, while the others were injured in their heads, limbs and shoulders. Police said the SUV had "Vidhayak" (MLA) written on it and was driven by Dinesh Lodhi. In a video clip, Lodhi is seen blaming the victims. "I was honking, why didn't they move? Three people were sitting on the bike and were swerving," he is heard saying in the clip. He is also seen warning bystanders against recording him. A case has been registered against him under Section 281 of BNS. —AGENCIES

—ANI

Four more held in Delhi brigadier assault case

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Four suspects have been detained in connection with an assault on an Army brigadier and his son **Tejas Arora**, and threats to his wife in Vasant Enclave, Delhi. The accused are Surjit Singh, 36, Sunil Sharma, 53, Ashish, 32, all from Mehram Nagar, and Satender, 35, from Bhiwani, Haryana. They reportedly left in Surjit's Aura car after a quarrel over alcohol consumption outside the residence. The suspects fled after the case was registered, but police arrested all four. The vehicle has been recovered. Investigations are on to determine each individual's role in the 11 April incident. —PTI

Illegal mining threatening Chambal Sanctuary: SC

Rajasthan, MP, UP told to install Wi-Fi-enabled CCTV

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Supreme Court said on Friday that the rampant illegal riverbed sand mining has created an "environmental crisis" and has wreaked "havoc" in the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, posing a grave risk to the gharial (long-snouted crocodile) preservation project.

Slamming the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh for their total failure in dealing with the issue, the SC directed them to install high-resolution Wi-Fi-enabled CCTV cameras along all routes frequently used for illegal sand mining in the area.

Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said that the live feed of the surveillance cameras should be placed under the direct control, supervision and operational oversight of the SP or the SSP of the concerned district and the divisional forest officer.

The SC said the authorities should seize vehicles and machinery used for illegal sand mining and prosecute those reponsible —FREEPIK

It said these officers must ensure continuous monitoring of the CCTV feeds by designating appropriate officers.

The bench directed the authorities in these three states to initiate prompt action if any instance of illegal mining or allied activities comes to light.

It said the authorities should seize vehicles or machinery found involved in illegal sand mining and also prosecute the persons involved in it.

The bench, which passed several other directions, posted the matter for hearing on 11 May.

- The National Chambal Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400-sq km tri-state protected area home to the endangered gharial

The SC passed the order in a suo motu case titled 'In Re: Illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Sanctuary and threat to endangered aquatic wildlife.'

The National Chambal Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400-sq km tri-state protected area.

Besides the endangered gharial, it is home to the red-crowned roof turtle and the endangered Ganges River Dolphin. — PTI

POST MURDER OF KIDS

Women hold torches during a rally to protest against the recent bomb attack in which two children were killed, at Singjamei, in Imphal, Manipur —PTI

Thousands defy ban orders, hold torch rally in Imphal

IMPHAL/GUWAHATI, 17 APRIL

Thousands of people defied ban orders in Manipur's Imphal West district and took out a torch rally to protest the recent bomb attack in which two children were killed, triggering clashes with security forces, officials said.

Thousands carrying torches began the rally at around 7 pm on Thursday at Singjamei, demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible for the 7 April blast at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district that claimed the lives of two children. Officials said some protesters raised slogans against the security forces and abused personnel deployed at the spot.

After covering nearly 2 km, the rally reached Chingamathak, a few km from the chief minister's bungalow, police headquarters and Lok Bhavan.

Security personnel, who were heavily outnumbered, asked the protesters to turn back as ban orders were in force, leading to a confrontation, officials said.

As the situation turned volatile, security forces fired tear gas shells and resorted to baton charges to disperse the crowd. Youths pelted stones at the forces, escalating tensions.

Several people were injured in the clashes, with at least five taken to a nearby hospital for minor injuries and breathing difficulties caused by tear gas. — PTI

Reddys own 13.5 pc of land in Telangana, says survey

HYDERABAD, 17 APRIL

The Reddy community of Telangana, which constitutes 4.8 per cent of the population, owns 13.5 per cent of the land in the state, followed by Yadava community with a strength of 5.7 per cent, holding 8.7 per cent of land, the caste survey conducted by the Congress government of Telangana revealed.

The survey report, which was made public on 15 April, said that the state average of irrigated land owned per family is 0.7 acres on average. It can be observed that all castes, except BC-B Perika, Velama and Reddy, own irrigated land less than the state average.

"At the top, Reddys own the highest share of land relative to their population, indicating historical advantages in land accumulation, followed by Velamas and ST Koya. In contrast, communities like SC Bedas and general category Muslims own much less land compared to their population share, reflecting their historical marginalisation," the report said. Regarding marriage, the survey found that about five per cent or 2.16 lakh girls below 18 were married. .

The highest share of married girls below 18 was among Iyengars/Iyers (21.2 per cent), and Jains (11 per cent), it said.

On sex ratio, the survey found that in Telangana the average female-to-male ratio is 0.98. Interestingly, Gonds, Koyas (both STs), Malas and Madigas (both SCs) report a ratio greater than 1, while general castes like Iyengars/Iyers, Jains, Rajus and general category Muslims have a ratio much less than the state average of 0.98. — PTI

TN law varsity VC's remarks on women spark protests

TIRUCHY, 17 APRIL

Students of Tamil Nadu National Law University protested against Vice Chancellor V Nagaraj's remarks linking women wearing shorts to inviting sexual harassment. The students demanded an apology after Nagaraj reportedly told class representatives that girls in shorts cause distraction and invite misconduct. A source described his comments as "fatherly advice" made in the interest of the university's reputation.

The protest saw students holding placards reading "blame the mindset, not clothes." Later, Nagaraj addressed the issue, saying his comment was taken out of context.

He explained he referred to promoting the university's reputation and suggested presentable dress as a factor for improving its image. — PTI

EXCESS FUEL LED TO VEDANTA BLAST

SAKTI, 17 APRIL

A preliminary technical investigation into the Vedanta power plant blast in Sakti district has revealed that excess fuel inside the boiler caused a pressure surge, leading to the explosion. Police confirmed that the blast on 14 April at Singhitarai village occurred when a steam tube burst, resulting in 20 deaths.

The initial report by the Chief Boiler Inspector states that the excess fuel generated high pressure, which caused the boiler to explode, forcing a pipe out of its position. The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) verified that fuel accumulation and pressure were primary causes. Investigations also revealed negligence by Vedanta and its contractor NGSL (NTPC GE Power Services Limited).

An FIR has been filed under sections for causing death through negligence, negligent operation of machinery, and common intention. —PTI

Haji Syed Salman Chishty visits Moscow

MOSCOW, 17 APRIL

Haji Syed Salman Chishty, the Gaddi Nashin of Dargah Ajmer Sharif and the Chairman of the Chishty Foundation, held official meetings in Moscow that brought together the essential pillars of India–Russia relations: diplomacy, bilateral trade, spiritual fellowship, interfaith dialogue and BRICS collaboration.

Haji Syed Salman Chishty called upon Vinay Kumar, the Ambassador of India to the Russian Federation, accompanied by Nikhilesh Giri, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) and senior embassy officials. The delegation included Suhail Vakil, the Director of the Al Vakil Manpower Company, and Ilyas, a representative of the Deputy Grand Mufti Sheikh Damir Hazrat, who serves under His Holiness Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdinov, the Chairman of the Russian Muftis Council and the Religious Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation.

Discussions spanned a broad agenda from strengthening people-to-people connections through diplomacy, to exploring concrete avenues for trade and manpower cooperation.

The meeting also addressed the civilizational and spiritual bonds between India and Russia, the importance of interfaith dialogue between the two nations, their communities, and opportunities for joint engagement within the BRICS framework to ensure peace and global development.

Haji Syed Salman Chishty also visited the Grand Mosque Centre in Moscow, one of the largest Islamic mosques in Europe. — Salar News

NIT Kurukshetra student ends life, protests erupt on campus

KURUKSHETRA, 17 APRIL

A second-year student at the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Kurukshetra, was found hanging from a ceiling fan in her hostel room. This is the fourth student suicide on the campus in the last two months.

Adarsh Police Station SHO, Vishal Kumar, said the deceased Diksha Dubey, hailed from Bihar and was pursuing BTech in Artificial Intelligence and Data Science.

On Thursday, when Dubey did not respond to the phone calls of her friends, they went to her room and found the room locked from the inside. Police rushed to the spot at about 3 pm, and found her hanging from the ceiling fan, he said.

The body has been shifted to LNJP Civil Hospital for autopsy.

The suicide led to protests on campus, with a large number of students gathering late at night to protest at the main gate.

Adarsh Police Station SHO Vishal Kumar said the deceased Diksha Dubey, hailed from Bihar and was pursuing BTech in AI and Data Science —ANI

The Officiating Director of NIT Kurukshetra, Brahmjit, said the administration has accepted many demands of the students who staged a protest on campus last night.

Among the key decisions, the institute has agreed to allow re-examinations for re-appear papers every year, replacing the earlier even-odd semester system. — PTI

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Four Maoists killed in Hazaribag encounter with security forces

HAZARIBAG, 17 APRIL

Four Maoists were killed in an encounter with security forces in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district on Friday, police officials said.

The encounter took place in the Batuka forest area in Keredari police station limits, following a tip-off, they said. One of the ultras killed has been identified as Sahdeo Mahto, who carried a bounty of Rs 15 lakh on him.

The SDPO of Barkagaon, Pawan Kumar, said, "Four Maoists were killed in the encounter. No policemen were injured in the operation."

The development comes close on the heels of a fierce exchange of fire between a Maoist squad headed by Misir Besra, who carries a bounty of Rs 1 crore, and the police on 15 April in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum. Four policemen were injured in the encounter.

The Centre had earlier informed state governments that there are no Naxal violence-affected districts in the country. — PTI

NO MORE FEAR

A year later J&K's Pahalgam emerges out of terror's shadow

SRINAGAR, 17 APRIL

On 22 April 2025, the world was shocked when a terrorist attack ripped through the quaint Baisaran meadow in J&K's Pahalgam, snuffing out 26 innocent lives.

The brutal attack carried out by Lashkar-e-Toiba cadres led to an exodus of tourists from Jammu and Kashmir, prompting the authorities to shut nearly 50 tourist spots before reopening some of those in a phased manner after a security audit.

Now, after a year, the famed of Pahalgam are once again buzzing with tourists, with none ruing their decision to visit the 'Mini Switzerland' in Anantnag district.

"It feels really good to be here. I never imagined such vast plains at this altitude. We've been to Manali, Gangtok, and the Northeast, but we didn't expect such open grounds here. The security arrangements are excellent," Ashutosh Kosaria from Chhattisgarh said.

Last year's terror attack did not deter the Kosaria family.

"Many people live here. You can see the whole city from a temple above. It's hard to believe that such things (terror attacks) can happen here," Kosaria said.

Tanushree from Kolkata was all praise for the security arrangements. — PTI

Godman Kharat's aide, wife die in crash; oppn cries foul

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Jailed self-styled godman **Ashok Kharat**'s close associate and his wife died when their car rammed a stationary truck on Samruddhi Expressway in Maharashtra's Ahilya nagar district on Friday, prompting some Opposition leaders to raise suspicion over the incident.

Police identified the deceased as Jitendra Shelke, 55, and his wife Anuradha, 50. Their 14-year-old son was injured seriously in the accident, an official informed.

Shelke was a close associate of Nashik-based godman Kharat, who has been arrested for rape and fraud. Shelke was Kharat's business partner and also vice-president of the Shivanika Trust set up by the 'godman.'

The accident took place at around 12 pm near Dhotre village in Ahilyanagar district, he said.

Shelke, who was driving the car, his wife and son were coming to Thane from Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar via the Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway. As the car reached Dhotre, he lost control and rammed into a parked container truck.

"All three suffered grievous injuries and were rushed to a hospital, where Shelke and his wife died. The couple's son is undergoing treatment. A case was registered at Kopargaon police station," he said.

With the help of experts, a crash analysis will be carried out to determine the cause of the accident, said Ahilyanagar SP Somnath Gharge.

Opposition leaders wondered if the accident was "engineered" to suppress facts in the probe against Kharat. — PTI

Asha Bhosle

THE REBEL, THE WOMAN, THE SURVIVOR

BALAJI RAMACHANDRAN & SHANKAR IYER

In the flood of tributes that inevitably follow a towering artist's life, the narrative often settles into familiar patterns—milestones, collaborations, numbers, and accolades. But to view Asha Bhosle only through those lenses is to miss the far more compelling story: **that of a woman who lived on her own terms, often against the grain, and carved her identity not just through music, but through resilience, defiance, and an unyielding sense of self.**

This is not merely the story of a singer. It is the story of a rebel - quiet at times, fierce when required—and above all, deeply human.

ADVERSITY AS THE FIRST TEACHER

Long before she became a celebrated name, Asha's life was shaped by loss and necessity. The early demise of her father, Deenanath Mangeshkar, forced the family into a reality where survival took precedence over choice. Along with her elder sister Lata Mangeshkar, she stepped into the working world at the tender age of 10, when most children are still discovering themselves.

This was not a romanticised beginning. It was harsh, demanding, and unforgiving.

In those formative years, Asha did not have the luxury of artistic selectivity. Every song she sang was not just an assignment, it was sustenance. Each recording meant that the household could function a little longer, that responsibilities could be met, that dignity could be preserved. If that meant singing songs that others might have refused, so be it. There was a quiet courage in that acceptance — a willingness to do what was necessary, not what was ideal. From that spirit comes her legacy of over 8,000 Hindi film songs spread over eight decades (Overall, an estimate of close to 12,000 songs across languages, film and non-film).

It is perhaps here that we first encounter the rebel in her — not in loud defiance, but in an inner resolve to endure and move forward.

A LIFE DECISION AND ITS AFTERMATH

One of the most defining and delicate chapters of her life was her early marriage. At just 16, she made the impulsive decision to elope and marry. It was a choice made in youth, perhaps in search of autonomy, perhaps in defiance of circumstance.

The years that followed, however, were far from easy.

Without dwelling on details that risk reducing a deeply personal experience to mere narrative, it is important to acknowledge that this phase of her life brought significant emotional strain. What stands out, however, is not the adversity itself, but her response to it. She chose to walk away — while raising two children and expecting a third.

That decision, in its context, required immense courage. To step out of a difficult marriage, return to an uncertain professional space, and rebuild one's life is never easy, more so in a time when societal expectations were far less forgiving.

And yet, she did.

Her journey as a mother too was marked by profound sorrow. To outlive two of one's children is a grief that defies articulation. That she carried this pain with grace, continuing to create, to perform, and to engage with life, speaks to a depth of strength that often goes unacknowledged.

THE NAME SHE CHOSE TO KEEP

Names carry identity, memory, and sometimes, contradiction.

After her first marriage, she became "Asha Bhosle." What is intriguing is that she retained this surname throughout her life — even after the marriage ended, and even after she later married RD Burman.

She could have, at multiple points, chosen differently. She could have returned to the Mangeshkar name, which by then had become synonymous with excellence. She could have adopted a new identity after her second marriage. But she did neither.

What does this choice signify?

Perhaps it reflected a fierce sense of ownership — of her life, her decisions, and even her follies. Perhaps it was a way of saying that one's past, however complex, need not be erased to move forward. Or perhaps, it was simply an assertion of individuality in a world eager to define her through associations.

FINDING A VOICE: THE EARLY STRUGGLES

In her early years as a playback singer, Asha was still searching for recognition, for stability, and perhaps most importantly, for her own voice.

Two songs, at the least, in her initial career, bear traces of influence of Geeta Dutt, who was more established at the time. This was not imitation as much as it was adaptation—a young artist navigating an industry with established benchmarks, trying to find a foothold. Songs like *'Man more gaa jhoomke', 'Dol mere man pyar se', 'Shokh shokh aankhein'* are cases in point.

The turning point came with her association with OP Nayyar.

THE NAYYAR CHAPTER: ART, SUPPORT AND SILENCE

The professional collaboration between Asha Bhosle and OP Nayyar transformed both their careers. Nayyar, known for his distinctive musical sensibilities, saw in her a potential that others had perhaps not observed. More importantly, he shaped her voice — encouraging a style that was playful, sensuous, and rhythmically vibrant, setting her apart from her contemporaries.

Throughout the 1960s, it is remarkable that nearly every Nayyar composition featuring a female voice was sung by her. This was not merely a professional preference; it was a creative partnership of rare intensity.

And then, as abruptly as it flourished, the association ended.

Asha chose not to speak publicly about this phase after their separation — a silence that commands respect. It suggests a deliberate decision to preserve certain experiences as private, resisting the temptation to turn them into public narrative.

Yet, their music remains—a testament to a period when personal and professional currents seemed to converge in powerful ways. How can one remain unaffected by the timeless gems when the two came together – *'Poocho na hamein hum unke liye', 'Ye sama phir kahaan', 'Koi kehde kehde zamane se jaake', 'Ek tu hai piya jispe dil aa gaya'* and many others…

TRANSITIONS AND CHOICES: THE BURMAN ERA

With RD Burman

If the Nayyar years represented discovery, her association with RD Burman marked reinvention.

Their eventual marriage was unconventional in many ways. He was younger to her by six years, and the relationship faced resistance from different quarters. Yet, it was also a meeting of artistic minds, one that produced some of the most memorable musical expressions of its time.

An interesting, albeit sensitive, observation often arises in discussions of this period: the apparent overlap between the decline of Nayyar's prominence and the rise of Burman's. Did Asha, consciously or otherwise, align herself with emerging currents in the industry?

Framed crudely, such a question risks sounding opportunistic. But viewed through a more nuanced lens, it reflects something else entirely... professional foresight. In a field as unpredictable as cinema, the ability to adapt, to recognise changing trends, and to position oneself accordingly is not merely advantageous; it is essential.

If Asha did make such choices, they can perhaps be seen not as acts of abandonment, but as decisions rooted in survival, growth, and continuity. After all, her journey had always been about making the most of the opportunities available—and sometimes, about creating those opportunities herself. Mixed gems of the Asha – RDB collaboration like *'Daiyya yeh main kahaan phansi', 'Phirse aaiyo badra bidesi', 'Maar daalega dard-e-jigar', 'Meri nazar hai tujhpe'* and *'Chhoti si kahani se'* continue to wow music lovers eternally.

MAKING OPPORTUNITY COUNT

This ability to seize the moment is evident in several phases of her career.

When S. D. Burman and Lata Mangeshkar had a professional disagreement, Asha stepped in to fill the void. It was a significant opportunity, and she embraced it fully — delivering performances that not only met expectations but expanded her own artistic range.

Similarly, her association with composer Ravi. Filmmaker B R Chopra who showed his faith in Ravi, is also believed to have strongly supported Asha Bhosle as the female singing voice in his films. Ravi, in turn, gave her compositions that allowed her to explore emotional depth and nuance in new ways.

In each of these instances, the pattern is clear: opportunity may have knocked, but it was her readiness—and her willingness to step beyond comfort—that allowed her to make it count.

Just sample these melodies of Asha for S.D.Burman and Ravi – *Jeene do aur jiyo, tujhe mili roshni mujhko andhera, Dil ki manzil kuch aisi hai manzil, Ta thai tak thai, Raat chup hai chandni madhosh hai, Dil ki kahani rang laayi hai, Aaj ye meri zindagi, uljhan suljhe na* – to know how the impactful partnerships blossomed with progressing time.

THE REBEL WITH A CAUSE

To describe Asha Bhosle as a "rebel" is not to suggest rebellion for its own sake. Hers was not a defiance born of impulse, but one shaped by circumstance, conviction, and an instinct for self-preservation.

With Usha Mangeshkar

She challenged norms - by fighting it out and remaining career focused, during her tough marriage years, choosing her own path in relationships and navigating professional transitions on her terms. She endured losses, both personal and emotional, without allowing it to define her entirely. She made choices that were not always conventional but were undeniably her own.

And perhaps most importantly, she transformed these experiences into art.

Asha Bhosle's singing shows a certain emotional texture —a lived quality—that cannot be taught or replicated. It comes from having seen life in its many shades, from having felt deeply, and from having emerged, time and again, with a renewed sense of purpose.

BEYOND THE FAMILIAR NARRATIVE

In the end, to remember Asha Bhosle only through statistics or even through her most celebrated works is to see only part of the picture.

The fuller portrait is that of a woman who navigated complexity with courage, who embraced her imperfections, and who refused to be confined by expectations — whether societal, professional, or personal.

Her life reminds us that greatness is not always about perfection. Sometimes, it is about persistence. About the ability to keep moving, to keep creating, and to keep believing in one's own voice — even when the world is uncertain.

In that sense, Asha Bhosle was not just an artist of extraordinary ability. She was, in the truest sense, a rebel with a cause.

And perhaps the most fitting way to understand her journey is through the philosophy captured from her song in 'Waqt'.

"Aagey bhi jaane na tu,
Peechhe bhi jaane na tu,
Jo bhi hai, bas yahi ek pal hai."

(You know not the future, you know not the past, that which exists, exists in the moment)

A song that gently reminds us of life's fleeting, unknowable nature. The future remains uncertain, the past often beyond full comprehension, and what truly belongs to us is only the present moment. In many ways, this idea mirrors Asha Bhosle's life. She did not remain imprisoned by what had gone before, nor did she wait for guarantees of what lay ahead. Instead, she lived, and sang, fully in the moment that was hers. Each decision, each risk, each reinvention seemed rooted in this instinctive embrace of the "now". And perhaps that is the quiet lesson she leaves behind: that life, in all its unpredictability, is best met not with hesitation, but with presence, courage, and an unrelenting will to move forward.

Balaji Ramachandran and Shankar Iyer head Team Nostalgiaana which has rekindled the radio nostalgia for Retro Hindi Film Music through specially curated online shows for close to six years. This is part of an endeavour to recreate the days when listening to the radio was an intrinsic part of our lives.

The authors can be reached on www.nostalgiaana.com

Lebanon hopeful as ceasefire holds

Bibi says won't withdraw; Trump says enough is enough; Hezbollah thanks Iran

DUBAI, 17 APRIL

The 10-day ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel appeared to take effect on Friday, although the Lebanese army did accuse the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) of violating the ceasefire. UN peacekeepers in Lebanon on Friday said air-strikes have halted since ceasefire, but there has been shelling.

US President Donald Trump said on Friday said that Israel is "prohibited" by the US from further strikes on Lebanon and that "enough is enough" in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

Hope gripped the Lebanese people as thousands began returning to their homes in southern Lebanon. Nearly a million people have been displaced by the war between the Hezbollah militants and Israel.

By early morning, cars were backed up for kilometers on the route leading south to the damaged Qasmiyeh bridge over the Litani River, a bridge that links the north with the south that Israel has tried to destroy.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israeli forces would not withdraw from southern Lebanon, where the IDF intends to set up a "security zone".

"We will remain in a 10-kilometre security zone, which will allow us to prevent infiltration into communities and anti-tank missile fire," Netanyahu said.

Meanwhile, Hassan Fadlallah, a senior Hezbollah lawmaker, praised Iran as he spoke to reporters in a battered Beirut southern suburb.

A man inspects a destroyed building in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon on Friday, after the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon —PTI

Displaced Lebanese people begin returning home after the ceasefire came into effect —X@PRESSTV

"Yesterday, before the ceasefire, Hezbollah's leadership was formally informed from the Iranian ambassador that there will be a ceasefire at night," he said. "We were informed from the Islamic Republic that the calls they took with Saudi and Pakistan were encouraging for a ceasefire as first step."

Fadlallah said that the militant group's key positions — a complete ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli troops, a return of all Lebanese displaced people, releasing prisoners held by Israel and reconstruction — have not changed.

Fadlallah warned Lebanon not to enter direct talks with Israel, saying it would be a concession as Israel troops remained on Lebanese soil.

Hezbollah also said in a statement that its fingers remained "on the trigger" in the case of "betrayal". —PTI

IMF resumes deals with Venezuela after 7 years

WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced it is resuming relations with Venezuela under its interim leadership, ending a seven-year suspension. In a statement, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the decision was made following the views of IMF members representing a majority of the voting power, in line with long-standing practice. She stated that the IMF is now engaging with Venezuela's government for the first time since March 2019, under acting President Delcy Rodriguez. The move follows the US Department of the Treasury removing Rodriguez from its sanctions list, effectively lifting restrictions. Relations were cut in 2019 amid disputes over leadership recognition. Venezuela has been an IMF member since 1946.—PTI

Australia's most decorated vet gets bail for war crimes

MELBOURNE, 17 APRIL

Ben Roberts-Smith, Australia's most decorated living veteran, was granted bail by a Sydney court, 10 days after being charged with war crimes over the killings of five Afghans. Judge Greg Grogin said exceptional circumstances justified his release, despite prosecutors warning he could flee or interfere with witnesses. The former Special Air Service Regiment corporal, 47, faces five counts of war crime murder linked to incidents in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province between 2009 and 2012. He was arrested on 7 April. Under Australian law, war crime murder involves intentionally killing non-combatants during armed conflict. Roberts-Smith, a recipient of the Victoria Cross, denies all allegations.—PTI

8 killed in helicopter crash on Indonesian island

JAKARTA, 17 APRIL

A helicopter flying between palm oil plantations on Borneo Island crashed, killing the eight people on board, Indonesian officials said Friday. The Airbus H130 owned by PT Matthew Air Nusantara lost contact on Thursday, five minutes after it took off from Melawi district in West Kalimantan province. It was on its way to another palm oil plantation in the Kubu Raya district. Searchers later located the wreckage and recovered the bodies of the two crew members and six passengers in the dense forests in Sekadau district, according to the National Search and Rescue Agency and the Transportation Ministry. Indonesia has been plagued by transportation accidents recently. —PTI

Singer D4vd held after teen's body found in car trunk

LOS ANGELES, 17 APRIL

Singer D4vd has been arrested on suspicion of killing a 14-year-old girl whose decomposed body was found last year in an apparently abandoned Tesla registered to him that was towed from the Hollywood Hills, police said Thursday. Los Angeles police said in a brief statement that the 20-year-old Houston-born alt-pop singer whose legal name is David Burke was being held without bail. The singer had been under investigation by an LA County grand jury looking into the death of Celeste Rivas Hernandez. The probe was officially secret, but its existence and the designation of D4vd as its target was revealed on 25 February when his mother, father and brother filed an objection in a Texas court to subpoenas demanding they testify. —PTI

Pak begins preparing for 2nd round of US-Iran talks

ISLAMABAD, 17 APRIL

Pakistan has started preparing to host the second round of high-stakes talks between the US and Iran during the next week aimed at securing a peace deal, officials said on Friday.

According to officials in Islamabad, "preparations have started in Islamabad and neighbouring Rawalpindi as thousands of police and paramilitary personnel have started coming from other provinces."

The US and Iran held rare direct talks in Pakistan over the weekend, but they ended without a deal.

A feverish diplomatic activity followed to bring the two sides back to the table, Pakistani sources said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has also embarked on a tri-nation tour from Wednesday, while Field Marshal Asim Munir went to Tehran. Sharif met Saudi and Qatari leaders and reached Turkey on Thursday night, while Munir has met several Iranian officials.

Notably, Iran and the US' two-week ceasefire has held up, but it is unclear what will happen if it ends on 22 April without a deal.

US President **Donald Trump** also indicated that he might go to Islamabad. "if a deal is signed...They want me." —PTI

IRAN AGREED TO GIVE NUCLEAR DUST TO US: TRUMP

Trump claimed that Iran has agreed to give its "nuclear dust" to the US as part of a peace deal. He appeared to be referring to Iran's enriched uranium. "It is very important that Iran does not have a nuclear weapon. And they've agreed to that," he said. "They've agreed to give us back the nuclear dust that's way underground because of the attack we made with the B2 bombers (last June)." Iran has consistently maintained that forgoing its right to nuclear enrichment is a red line. Iran and the US' talks in Islamabad collapsed over Tehran's nuclear programme.

UK, France hold summit on opening Hormuz

PARIS, 17 APRIL

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer kicked off a conference featuring 30 countries in Paris to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Notably, the US has not been invited to participate in the "Strait of Hormuz Maritime Freedom of Navigation Initiative" on Friday.

Ahead of the meeting, Macron posted on X that the plans would be "strictly defensive," limited to non-belligerent countries and deployed "when security conditions allow."

France and Britain have also led military planning meetings, in an echo of the "Coalition of the Willing" assembled to provide security for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire in that war.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni are expected to attend in person, with others joining by video.

French Defence Minister Catherine Vautrin said that Europe can demine the Strait or could provide "escort services" for vessels. —PTI

USS Abraham Lincoln participates in the US blockade of Iranian ports, in the Arabian Sea, on Thursday—X@CENTCOM

US to target Iran-linked ships worldwide

WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

- The US said it would board vessels anywhere in the world if they are linked to Iran

The US military will target ships tied to Iran across the world, widening its blockade of Iran's ports. Gen Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed specifically to operations in the Pacific, and said the US would be targeting vessels that left before the blockade even began earlier this week outside the Strait of Hormuz.

US forces in other areas of responsibility "will actively pursue any Iranian-flagged vessel or any vessel attempting to provide material support to Iran," he told reporters at the Pentagon.

The military also detailed an expansive lists of goods that it considers contraband, declaring that it will board, search and seize them from merchant vessels "regardless of location."

A notice published Thursday says any "goods that are destined for an enemy and that may be susceptible to use in armed conflict" are "subject to capture at any place beyond neutral territory". This includes weapons, oil, metals and electronics. —PTI

ICE head Todd Lyons to resign in May: DHS

WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

Todd Lyons — US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Acting Director and key executor of President Donald Trump's mass deportations agenda — will resign at the end of May, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Thursday. It is not immediately clear why Lyons is resigning. DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin described Lyons as a great leader of ICE. White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson described Lyons as "an American patriot who made our country safer."

TRUMP NOMINATES NEW CDC HEAD

Trump on Thursday nominated Erica Schwartz, a former deputy surgeon general, to be the next director of the Centres for Disease Control (CDC). In a social media post, Trump described Schwartz as "incredibly talented" and said, "She is a STAR!"

The Atlanta-based CDC, is charged with protecting Americans from preventable health threats. —PTI

Hegseth quotes fake Bible verse from 'Pulp Fiction'

WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

During his Pentagon briefing, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth asked people, as he usually does, to join him in reciting a verse from the Bible. Except this time, he read a speech from the movie 'Pulp Fiction'.

"They call it CSAR 25:17, which I think is meant to reflect Ezekiel 25:17," Hegseth said on Thursday.

"The path of the downed aviator is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of camaraderie and duty, shepherds the lost through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children," the former Fox News host recited. "I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to capture and destroy my brother. And you will know my call sign is Sandy 1 when I lay my vengeance upon thee, and amen."

The verse is nearly a word for word recital of a speech made by Samuel L Jackson's character from 1994 classic. The verse is recited some three times in the Quentin Tarantino directed blockbuster. —Agencies

US to probe 10 missing scientists

Trump said that unconfirmed reports that about 10 US-based nuclear scientists had gone missing or died in the last two months was "pretty serious" and vowed that authorities would investigate. He said he hope it was a coincidence that the scientist linked to sensitive national security research had disappeared.

B'desh to link nuke power, grid

Bangladesh has announced that it will begin connecting nuclear power to the national grid this year as the country faces an ongoing energy crisis driven by the West Asia situation. At least one unit of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Ishwardi Upazila is expected to start supplying electricity to the national grid this year, officials said.

US withdraws from Syrian base

With the US forces completing their withdrawal from the from Qasrak air base on Thursday, the Syrian army has now taken full control of most military sites in the country where Washington's troops were deployed to fight ISIS. Syria govt said the withdrawal came after the implementation of deal between the Syrian government and the Kurdish Forces.

EPSTEIN FILES AFTERMATH

Starmer refuses to resign over Mandelson scandal

LONDON, 17 APRIL

British Prime Minister **Keir Starmer** has no plans to resign for his scandal-tainted pick for UK ambassador to Washington, officials said on Friday.

Starmer claims he was unaware that the Foreign Office overruled security officials' 2025 recommendation against appointing Peter Mandelson. The top Foreign Office civil servant, Olly Robbins, took the fall for the decision and resigned late on Thursday. Starmer will speak in Parliament on the issue on Monday.

Documents released by the government in March showed Starmer ignored red flags raised by his staff. He was warned that Mandelson's friendship with convicted sex trafficker **Jeffrey Epstein**, who died in prison in 2019, exposed the government to "reputational risk."

Opposition politicians expressed disbelief that Starmer could have been unaware that Mandelson had failed security vetting.

However, as controversy ensued, Starmer fired Mandelson in September 2025.

Emails between Epstein and Mandelson suggest that the ambassador passed sensitive information to the disgraced financier in 2009. —PTI

Former prez released in Myanmar's amnesty

BANGKOK, 17 APRIL

Myanmar's former president Win Myint was released on Friday as part of a broad prisoner amnesty by newly sworn-in President Min Aung Hlaing, to mark the New Year, according to state-run media. The pardon applies to over 4,500 prisoners, though it is unclear how many opposing military rules are included.

There is no indication that 80-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi will be freed. Win Myint, a loyalist elected in 2018, was detained on February 1, 2021, when the military seized power and arrested Suu Kyi.

He received a 12-year sentence for several offences, reduced to eight years in 2023. State media reported he, in prison in Taungoo, Bago region, had received amnesty. Outside Insein Prison, relatives welcomed released prisoners, including filmmaker Shin Daewe, sentenced to life in 2024. The amnesty follows Hlaing's inauguration after a contested election.

Nearly 8,000 civilians have been killed since 2021, with over 22,170 political detainees, including Suu Kyi, still jailed. Her sentence has been reduced to 22.5 years, and she will be moved to house arrest. —PTI

Markets rally on easing geopolitical tensions

Sensex rose by 504.86 points, while Nifty jumped by 156.80 points

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied nearly 1 per cent on Friday, driven by optimism surrounding easing geopolitical tensions, falling crude prices, and fresh foreign fund inflows. Renewed hopes of a diplomatic resolution between the US and Iran, along with a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, have materially improved global risk appetite, a market analyst said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 504.86 points, or 0.65 per cent, to settle at 78,493.54. During the day, it surged 564.77 points, or 0.72 per cent, to 78,553.45.

A total of 3,043 stocks advanced while 1,284 declined and 166 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 156.80 points, or 0.65 per cent, to end at 24,353.55. Investors' wealth surged by Rs 4.84 lakh crore to Rs 4,65,64,461.51 crore (USD 5.02 trillion) on BSE.

- Renewed hopes of a diplomatic resolution between the US and Iran, along with a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, have materially improved global risk appetite, a market analyst

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 943.29 points or 1.21 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 302.95 points or 1.25 per cent.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Hindustan Unilever, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, Bharat Electronics, Tech Mahindra and Titan were among the major winners. In contrast, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and HCL Tech were among the laggards. The BSE SmallCap Select index jumped 1.76 per cent, and the MidCap Select index climbed 1.31 per cent.

All indices ended higher. FMCG climbed 2.57 per cent, Capital Goods (2.19 per cent), Power (1.95 per cent), Utilities (1.51 per cent), Energy (1.43 per cent) and Industrials (1.32 per cent).

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 3.07 per cent to USD 96.34 per barrel.

The markets in the US ended in positive territory on 16 April. Foreign institutional investors bought equities worth Rs 382.36 crore on 16 April, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

Rupee rises to settle at 92.85 against USD

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

The rupee appreciated by 29 paise to settle at 92.85 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, buoyed by a weakening American currency and retreating crude oil prices amid increasing hopes of easing geopolitical tensions. Renewed buying in domestic equity markets and fresh inflow of foreign funds also supported the local currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 92.93 and touched an intraday high of 92.65 against the greenback. The unit also touched the day's low of 92.98. On 16 April, the rupee gained 19 paise to settle at 93.14 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index fell 0.12 per cent to 97.90.—*PTI*

Silver falls to Rs 2.5L/kg, gold to Rs 1.56 L/10g

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Silver price declined by Rs 5,700 to Rs 2.53 lakh per kilogram in New Delhi on Friday while gold fell to Rs 1.56 lakh per 10 grams amid subdued demand in the domestic market. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal plunged Rs 5,700, or 2.2 per cent, to Rs 2,53,000 per kg (inclusive of all taxes). Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also decreased Rs 1,600, or 1.01 per cent, to Rs 1,56,200 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). In the overseas markets, spot gold was trading marginally lower at USD 4,786.90 per ounce, while silver gained 1.12 per cent to USD 79.28 per ounce —*PTI*

Crisil Q1 net profit rises 46% to Rs 233 crore

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Domestic rating agency—Crisil—reported a 45.9 per cent rise in net profit on Friday to Rs 233.3 crore for the January-March quarter. Registering a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 159.8 crore in the March quarter of the preceding fiscal year. Crisil Managing Director and CEO Amish Mehta said the growth in businesses during Q1 FY26 was driven by customer centricity and differentiated, domain-led solutions. Crisil projects India's GDP to grow by 7.1 per cent this fiscal year, down from 7.6 per cent last year, noting increasing downside risks. Its consolidated total income for the first quarter of fiscal year 2026 rose 29.6 per cent to Rs 1,093.7 crore compared to Rs 843.8 crore in the year-ago period. —*PTI*

MCD offers Rs 13,500 per acre to hire gardeners

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has revived a scheme to address the shortage of gardeners in the national capital's parks, officials said on Friday. Under the scheme, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) across Delhi will get Rs 13,500 per acre to hire a gardener for park maintenance, officials added. The scheme, based on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, was reintroduced last week by MCD's horticulture department. It was originally rolled out before the merger of the North, South and East Delhi municipal corporations in 2022. Residents and ward councillors have repeatedly complained about the deteriorating condition of parks, citing a dearth of gardeners. Currently, the MCD maintains 15,320 parks across its 12 zones, covering nearly 5,200 acres —*PTI*

POTENTIAL IRAN-US DEAL

Crude prices fall 2% to Rs 8,396/barrel

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Crude oil prices declined by just over 2 per cent to Rs 8,396 per barrel in futures trade on Friday, amid signals of a potential US-Iran agreement and easing geopolitical tensions that eased fears of prolonged supply disruptions.

May delivery crude fell Rs 180, or 2.1 per cent, on the Multi Commodity Exchange. Kaveri More, Commodity - Technical Research at Choice Broking, stated that "Crude futures declined after US President Donald Trump expressed optimism over a potential agreement with Iran, easing concerns over prolonged supply disruptions."

Trump indicated Tehran might accept terms including abandoning nuclear ambitions, reopening the Strait of Hormuz, and offering "free oil," though Iran has not officially confirmed these claims. Internationally, oil futures remained below USD 100 per barrel, as investors became hopeful of a near-term resolution in West Asia.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for the May contract fell 1.02 per cent to USD 93.72 per barrel on NYMEX, while Brent oil for the June contract dipped nearly 1 per cent to USD 98.41 per barrel in New York.

- West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for the May contract fell 1.02 per cent to USD 93.72 per barrel on NYMEX, while Brent oil for the June contract dipped nearly 1 per cent to USD 98.41 per

More explained that additional pressure on crude prices followed the announcement of a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, reducing immediate geopolitical risks.

However, concerns persist over the Strait of Hormuz, which remains effectively closed under a dual blockade. Oil and gas output disruptions could take up to two years to restore, according to International Energy Agency Chief Fatih Birol, who warned that global oil production could fall by 13 million barrels per day, more than during the crises of 1973 and 1979. —*PTI*

WIPRO SHARES DROP 4% AFTER Q4 EARNINGS

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Shares of IT major Wipro declined by nearly 4 per cent in Friday morning trade after the firm reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 3,501.8 crore for the March quarter of FY26.

The stock edged lower by 3.61 per cent to Rs 202.60 on the BSE. At the NSE, it declined by 3.69 per cent to Rs 202.50.

Wipro's consolidated net profit for the March quarter is down 1.89 per cent from Rs 3,569.6 crore a year ago.

Wipro's board has also approved a mega Rs 15,000 crore share repurchase programme, proposing to buy back more than 5 per cent of its equity, or up to 60 crore shares, from shareholders at Rs 250 per share.

The firm's revenue rose 7.6 per cent to Rs 24,236.3 crore in Q4 FY26, as compared to Rs 22,504.2 crore in Q4 FY25. For the quarter ending 30 June, Wipro expects revenue from its IT services business to be in the range of USD 2,597-2,651 million. This translates to a sequential guidance of (-) 2.0 per cent to 0 per cent in constant currency terms. —*PTI*

SHARES FELL 9%

Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings to exit board

NEW YORK, 17 APRIL

The Netflix co-founder and chairman **Reed Hastings** will step down from the streaming service's board of directors in June when his term expires, the company said on Thursday.

Hastings plans to focus on philanthropy and other pursuits.

Hastings had served as Netflix's CEO for more than 20 years until 2023 after taking over the role from his friend and fellow company co-founder Marc Randolph in the late 1990s.

"My real contribution at Netflix wasn't a single decision; it was a focus on member joy, building a culture that others could inherit and improve, and building a company that could be both beloved by members and wildly successful for generations to come," he said in a statement.

- Hastings had served as Netflix's CEO for over 20 years until 2023 after taking over the role from his friend and fellow company co-founder Marc Randolph in the late

The company announced Hastings' departure along with its quarterly results on 17 April, its first earnings report since walking away from its offer to buy Warner Bros. Discovery's studio and streaming business in February.

Netflix shares fell nearly 9 per cent to USD 98.32 in after-hours trading after the company's outlook disappointed investors despite strong quarterly results. —*PTI*

Vedanta's claim of highest bidder false, says Jaypee

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the Resolution Professional (RP) of Jaypee Associates, told the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) that a "false and sensational narrative" is being created around Vedanta's claim of being the highest financial bidder in the insolvency resolution process.

Singhvi argued claims suggesting Vedanta was initially declared the highest bidder and later displaced are unfounded and unsupported by the record.

He clarified that an email from the RP to all resolution applicants, including Vedanta, was procedural, merely outlining that proposals would be evaluated holistically after the challenge process, and only disclosed net present value (NPV) figures without declaring Vedanta as the highest bidder.

Singhvi described the allegation as a "misreading of the record," emphasising that the email was routine and did not confer any "highest bidder" status.

He accused Vedanta of selectively presenting documents to create a misleading impression, noting that a key email was marked to all stakeholders, not just Vedanta.

Singhvi stressed that the evaluation was based on multiple criteria, and post-deadline proposals. —*ANI*

'Digital ad market to double to USD 22B by 2030'

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Indian digital advertising market is projected to double by 2030, reaching up to USD 22 billion, according to a report by market research firm Redseer Consulting.

The report states that digital ad spend growth is surpassing the broader economy, accounting for 70-75 per cent of global ad spend in 2025, and expanding at 3-5 times the pace of global real GDP.

Redseer senior consultant Madhav Gulati told PTI that India's digital ad market, currently at USD 11 billion in 2025, is expected to grow at 10-15 per cent CAGR, reaching USD 19-22 billion by 2030.

Geographically, the US holds around 46 per cent of global digital ad spend, followed by China at 24 per cent, while India's share is about 1 per cent.

The report highlights that mobile dominates digital advertising, accounting for over 65 per cent, with in-app ads comprising 80-85 per cent in the US. —*PTI*

RBI pulls out Rs 2L cr liquidity

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday pulled out Rs 2,00,031 crore transient liquidity from the banking system through a seven-day variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) auction.

The central bank had received higher bids worth Rs 2,28,098 crore than the notified amount of Rs 2 lakh crore in the auction.

The RBI accepted the bid at a 5.24 per cent cut-off rate and 5.23 per cent weighted average rate.

Currently, the liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 4.09 lakh crore.

Before this, the central bank had conducted a seven-day VRRR auction on 10 April and pulled out Rs 2,00,041 crore of transient liquidity from the banking system. These funds were reversed today into the banking system.

"Going ahead, we will continue to be proactive and pre-emptive in liquidity management and ensure sufficient liquidity in the banking system to meet the productive requirements of the economy," RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra said during the April monetary policy. —*PTI*

Women financially active, lack tailored advice: HSBC

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

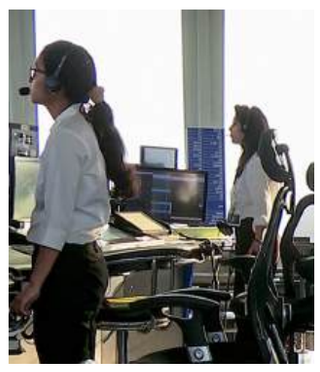
Women are actively engaged in managing their finances but face gaps in tailored financial guidance. According to a study report by HSBC, life-stage-based advisory solutions are needed. The report finds that women are intentional about wealth management, with nearly half of affluent women taking finances seriously by their 20s.

The study was conducted to understand how women, particularly affluent women, engage with financial planning and how existing financial systems and advisory models meet their evolving needs.

"Nearly half of affluent women surveyed began taking finances seriously in their 20s or earlier. Despite this engagement, our research reveals another striking truth: fewer than half of affluent women feel supported by their financial institution or advisor. This disconnect is what we call the Fluency Gap," the report says.

The report emphasises that financial fluency requires flexible, life-stage-based planning. Static advice often fails to account for evolving needs such as career shifts, caregiving responsibilities, and longer life expectancies.

It also notes that women's financial priorities evolve over time—from saving early on to retirement, caregiving, and wealth transfer later. —*ANI*



NET WORTH OF USD 92.6B

Adani overtakes Ambani to become Asia's richest

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Tycoon **Gautam Adani** has overtaken fellow Gujarat business czar **Mukesh Ambani** to become Asia's richest person, as a sustained rally in shares of his ports-to-energy conglomerate lifted his net worth.

With a net worth of USD 92.6 billion, Adani surpassed Ambani, whose fortune stands at USD 90.8 billion, according to the latest billionaire rankings.

Adani, founder of his eponymous group, oversees India's largest private seaport network, is the country's biggest renewable energy producer and private airport operator, and ranks among the world's largest coal traders.

He is currently ranked No. 19 on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, which tracks the world's 500 richest individuals and is updated daily.

Adani's wealth is largely derived from his shareholdings across the group's 10 listed companies. A recent surge in Adani Group stocks has added billions of dollars in market value, underscoring strong investor appetite for assets linked to India's economic expansion and energy transition.

By contrast, Ambani's wealth, anchored by his flagship conglomerate Reliance Industries that spans energy, telecom and retail, has seen comparatively modest gains.

Topping the billionaire ranking is Elon Musk, the chief executive of Tesla and rocket manufacturer SpaceX. His networth of USD 656 billion is more than double of his closest rival, Larry Page, co-founder of Alphabet. Page is worth USD 286 billion.

Adani and Ambani are the only Indians to make it to the top 50. —*PTI*

Farmers allege substandard bitter gourd seeds; FIR filed

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Farmers from Madhya Pradesh's Dhar and Khargone districts met Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Delhi on Friday and alleged heavy losses in their bitter gourd crop due to substandard seeds and seedlings.

Following their complaint, officials were directed to ensure compensation for the affected farmers and take strict legal action. An FIR was registered at Manawar Police Station in Dhar against Hyderabad-based Nunhems India Pvt Ltd and an investigation has begun.

The farmers had reportedly bought seeds and seedlings from nurseries and agricultural service centres in November 2025, but the crop failed to perform as expected. The fruits allegedly shrank, turned yellow and fell off, leading to major losses.

Agricultural scientists and department officials found that substandard seeds and seedlings were sold to farmers under the pretext of being certified,

Chouhan said it was about the loss of farmers' trust, hard work and capital. —*PTI*

RCB eye victory over inconsistent Delhi

Focus has largely remained on Virat Kohli

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Almost a month into IPL 2026, Royal Challengers Bengaluru have evolved into the most complete unit in the competition, and they will be eager to strengthen their hold on this tag when they face the struggling Delhi Capitals here on Saturday.

Focus has largely remained on Virat Kohli, and the batting talisman has not disappointed his fans either, holding the Orange Cap for the time being.

But even Kohli would acknowledge that the RCB batting no longer solely depends on him.

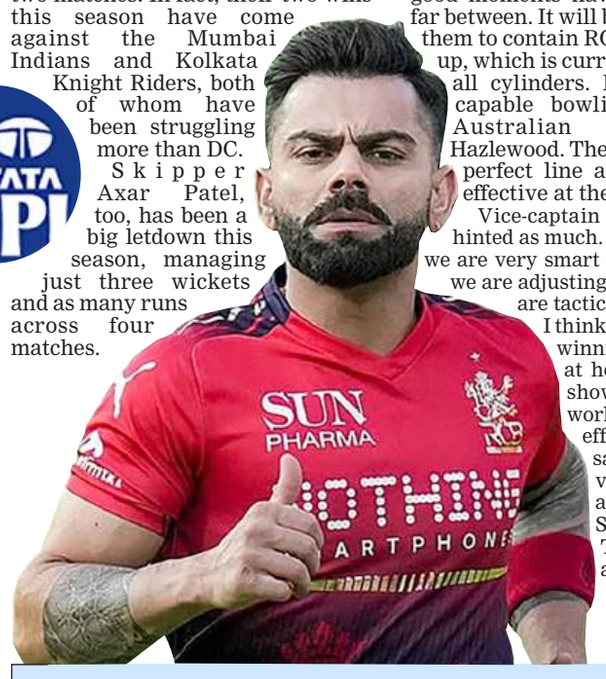
Skipper Rajat Patidar, Devdutt Padikkal, Phil Salt, and Tim David have all left their indelible marks on RCB's victories this season with buccaneering batting efforts, and they will be eager for an encore against DC. Patidar, in particular, has been impressive with his awesome six-hitting spree, leading the chart with 21 maximums from five matches and three ahead of the marauding Vaibhav Sooryavanshi of Rajasthan Royals. These efforts have probably freed up Kohli to pursue his craft, calm in the knowledge that there are more shoulders to carry the side's batting.

In contrast, the Capitals are still searching for capable shoulders to scaffold their batting.

They have some experienced batters such as KL Rahul, Pathum Nissanka, Tristan Stubbs, David Miller, and Nitish Rana, but none of them have been consistent so far, and even a fifth place on the table with four points looks like an exaggeration at this point.

Young batter Sameer Rizvi alone has shown some stomach for a fight, scoring two half-centuries, and those general failures have aptly reflected in their defeats in the last two matches. In fact, their two wins this season have come against the Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders, both of whom have been struggling more than DC.

Skipper Axar Patel, too, has been a big letdown this season, managing just three wickets and as many runs across four matches.



Similarly, inconsistency plagues them in bowling too. Star left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav looks totally out of sorts, having taken just three wickets after leaking nearly 10 runs an over, while pacers Mukesh Kumar and T Natarajan's good moments have been few and far between. It will be a tough job for them to contain RCB's batting lineup, which is currently firing from all cylinders. RCB also has a capable bowling unit under Australian quick Josh Hazlewood. They have found the perfect line and length to be effective at the Chinnaswamy.

Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma hinted as much. "I think this year we are very smart about the wicket, we are adjusting to the wicket, we are tactically working, and I think that's why we are winning all the games at home. I think that shows that we are working smartly and efficiently," Jitesh said after the previous match against Lucknow Super Giants here. The match starts at 3.30 pm. —*PTI*

-PTI

SRH face resurgent CSK in key mid-table battle

Hinge and Husain will look to put pressure on CSK

HYDERABAD, 17 APRIL

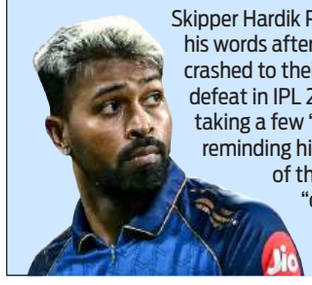
Having unleashed two exciting pace prospects in Praful Hinge and Sakib Husain, a balanced Sunrisers Hyderabad will head into their IPL match against Chennai Super Kings with renewed confidence, here on Saturday.

Drafted in place of seasoned campaigners Harshal Patel and Jaydev Unadkat, the uncapped duo made an immediate impact, reducing Rajasthan Royals to 9 for 5 inside the first three overs, pushing them to their first loss of the season. The 24-year-old Vidarbha pacer Hinge has been the standout bowler after dismantling the Royals' top-order consisting of Dhruv Jurel, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, and skipper Riyan Parag in his fiery first two overs. He finished with 4/34.

Using clever variations in the middle overs, Husain also returned with four wickets as Rajasthan were bowled out for 159 while chasing 216. The emergence of the young duo has lifted SRH's pace attack, which had been a concern early in the season, and brought better balance to a side otherwise loaded with batting firepower in Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Ishan Kishan, and Heinrich Klaasen. Fresh from their breakout performances, Hinge and Husain will look to pile more pressure on CSK skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who has struggled for runs this season. His highest so far is 28 across five innings. However, there is some relief for CSK with Sanju Samson rediscovering his T20 World Cup form, smashing an unbeaten century against Delhi Capitals, and following it up with a 48 in their win over Kolkata Knight Riders. Match starts: 7.30 p m . —*PTI*

Ruturaj Gaikwad -PTI

We need to take some tough calls: MI skipper Hardik Pandya after 4th successive defeat



Skipper Hardik Pandya did not mince his words after the Mumbai Indians crashed to their fourth successive defeat in IPL 2026, warning about taking a few "difficult calls" and reminding his misfiring teammates of the need to take "ownership" of the team's poor outings. In their latest debacle, the five-time champions lost to Punjab Kings by seven wickets and are now languishing ninth on the table with just two points. "To be very honest, I don't have much to say right now. I think we really need to go back to the drawing board and see where we are lacking. Is it individuals? Is it as a group? Is it planning? We'll just figure it out and see what we can do next," said Pandya after another morale-shattering loss on Thursday night. Indirectly, Pandya might have been hinting at the faltering show of MI seniors like Suryakumar Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, and Tilak Varma. "No, I think we need to see, do we need to make some difficult calls, or do we need to keep continuing and hope that we'll turn things around. These are some harsh questions which eventually we need to answer, and yeah, ownership has to be taken," he said. Suryakumar has scored a fifty, but his other scores have been 16, 6, 33, and 0, and Tilak Varma has a modest sequence of 20, 0, 14, 1, and 8.

-PTI

Australia to tour Pak in May-June for ODI series

KARACHI, 17 APRIL

The Australian cricket team is set to tour Pakistan in late May to play a three-match ODI series in Lahore and Rawalpindi, PCB sources said on Friday. The series is part of the agreement between Cricket Australia (CA) and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), under which the Australian T20 side visited the country before the T20 World Cup and played three matches in Lahore. The details of the tour are being finalised with Cricket Australia, but the matches will tentatively be held between 30 May and 5 June. The source added that the Australian team will fly from Pakistan to Bangladesh to play an ODI series on 9 June. Australia eventually didn't fare well in the World Cup.—*PTI*

Uber Cup 2026: Treesa-Gayatri pair ruled out due to injury

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, India's top women's doubles pair, will not be participating at the upcoming Uber Cup Finals, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) announced on Friday.

The duo, No. 30 in the latest BWF Rankings, has been out of action since Treesa sustained a shoulder injury during the first round at last month's Swiss Open. Treesa and Gayatri were ready to compete at the Badminton Asia Championships, but unfortunately, the former got injured again.

"Treesa sadly twisted her ankle just 2-3 days before leaving for the Badminton Asia Championships. It was an accident during training -- she stepped on her partner's foot," India's doubles coach B Sumeeth Reddy told PTI. "She is resting now and will undergo rehabilitation. It is not a major injury, and she should recover in about four weeks. She will look to return at the Singapore Open at the end of May," he added.

Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand have been out of action since the former sustained an injury during last month's Swiss Open -PTI

BAI has named Shruti Mishra and Priya Konjengbam, the pair currently ranked 48th, as their replacements for the women's competition set to be held in Horsens, Denmark, from April 24 to May 3. Kavipriya Selvam and Simran Singhi form the other doubles pair.

The squad, led by double Olympic medallist P. V. Sindhu, features in-form youngsters Unnati Hooda, Tanvi Sharma, Devika Sihag, and Isharani Baruah as other options for singles. Additionally, the team also has Tanisha Crasto due to her experience across doubles formats. —*PTI*

75TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

NRAI aims to introduce 7.5 lakh students to shooting

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The National Rifle Association of India plans to introduce approximately 7.5 lakh school students to the sport of shooting as part of its 75th foundation anniversary celebrations, which commenced at the Karni Singh Range here on Friday.

Among those present at the occasion were double Olympic medallist pistol shooter Manu Bhaker, Asian Games gold medallist Jitu Rai, NRAI Secretary General Pawankumar Singh, along with other officials, coaches, and members of the shooting fraternity.

"We have year-long celebrations planned. We have set a target of introducing 7.5 lakh new school students to shooting, where we will either visit their schools or call them to the nearest range and make them shoot 10-shots each," said Singh in a release.

"We will take the help of the government, the Ministry of Sports, as well as all the shooting academies and local shooting clubs across cities and districts of the country to achieve this goal. —*PTI*

BCCI FINES RR MANAGER ROMI BHINDER RS 1 LAKH

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

BCCI has fined Rajasthan Royals team manager Romi Bhinder Rs one lakh for PMOA protocol breach of using his phone in the dugout, besides issuing a warning following an unsatisfactory response to the board's showcause notice, its secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI on Friday. The breach occurred during the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru in Guwahati on 10 April. The BCCI anti-corruption unit, led by Sharad Kumar, subsequently showcaused Bhinder, asking for an explanation. Saikia said the ACU found Bhinder guilty after not being satisfied with his response. —*PTI*

Aston Villa breeze past Bologna into UEL semi vs Forest

LONDON, 17 APRIL

Aston Villa blew Bologna away with a trio of first-half goals as they roared into the semifinals of the Europa League with a 4-0 victory, winning 7-1 on aggregate.

Unai Emery's side cruised into a second European semifinal in three years to set up an all-Premier League clash with Nottingham Forest for a place in the final in Istanbul.

The Villa boss is an expert in this competition with four titles to his name, and few would bet against him adding a fifth.

Villa brought a healthy 3-1 lead into the home leg of their last-eight clash, and any hopes of an Italian revival were quickly snuffed out as the rampant hosts ran in three goals in the first period, starting with a lovely team effort which was rounded off by Ollie Watkins tapping in his 100th goal for the club.

Emi Buendia put Villa 2-0 ahead on the night just 46 seconds after Morgan Rogers saw a spot kick saved, but the England international made amends for his penalty miss by putting Villa 3-0 up before the break with his first goal since 7 Feb. Ezri Konsa's second goal of the tie wrapped up a convincing win late on.

The visitors' lively start was undone by a moment of team brilliance from Villa in the 16th minute. —*PTI*

Aston Villa players celebrate after scoring a goal against Bologna in the Europa League -X/@ASTONVILLA

New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 26 runs in first ODI

MIRPUR, 17 APRIL

New Zealand's fast bowlers overcame scorching heat to produce a clinical performance, guiding the side to a 26-run victory against Bangladesh in the opening game of the three-match ODI series on Friday.

The pace trio of Blair Tickner, Nathan Smith, and Will O'Rourke shared eight wickets to play a crucial role in bowling out Bangladesh for 221 in 48.3 overs.

Electing to bat first, New Zealand posted a challenging 247-8 on a slow wicket, riding a patient 68 from opener Henry Nicholls and a brisk 59 from Dean Foxcroft.

After the early departure of Nick Kelly, Nicholls added 73 runs with Will Young (30) to steady the innings, defying a superb spell by pacer Shoriful Islam.

Shoriful, who was playing his first ODI since December 2024 after replacing the injured Mustafizur Rahman, claimed 2-27 in 10 overs. —*PTI*

-PTI

Shubhankar Sharma wins inaugural Boulders Classic

HYDERABAD, 17 APRIL

Two-time European Tour winner Shubhankar Sharma delivered a dominating performance to win the inaugural Boulders Classic here on Friday. Making a highly anticipated return to the DP World PGTI circuit for his first domestic event since December 2021, Shubhankar, also a two-time Asian Tour winner, took control early with back-to-back six-under 66s to open up a two-shot lead at the halfway stage. The 29-year-old then all but sealed the contest on Day 3 with a mammoth seven-shot lead heading into the final day. He carded an eight-under 64, a round featuring nine birdies and just one bogey, which also equalled the course record. He maintained his aggressive yet controlled approach during Friday's final round to comfortably close out the championship.—*PTI*

NOVAK DJOKOVIC PULLS OUT OF MADRID OPEN

MADRID, 17 APRIL

Novak Djokovic has pulled out of the Madrid Open because of a lingering injury.

The fourth-ranked Djokovic hasn't competed since the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells. He missed the Miami Open because of a right shoulder injury and also skipped the Monte Carlo Masters.

"Madrid, unfortunately, I won't be able to compete at the Madrid Open this year," he wrote on Friday on his social media accounts. "I'm continuing my recovery to be back soon. ¡Hasta pronto!" —*PTI*

JAIL & HEFTY FINES LIKELY

Sports ministry mulls criminalisation of doping

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Amid Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya's push to criminalise doping, provisions advocating jail and hefty fines for suppliers of banned substances from the draft anti-doping bill of 2018 are back in focus, along with the debate and pushback it triggered from bodies like the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

Criminalisation of doping was a major talking point at the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Global Anti-Doping Intelligence and Investigations Network (GAIIN) Final Conference here on Thursday.

WADA President Witold Banka reiterated that he would always encourage governments to criminalise doping, but only target the suppliers and facilitators, like corrupt coaches and managers, while safeguarding the interests of the athletes.

It was less than a decade ago when India had made preparations to criminalise doping following recommendations of a committee headed by Justice (Retd) Mukul Mudgal, the man who also investigated the 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal in Indian cricket. "...any person who indulges in the supply of a prohibited substance to an athlete regularly for commercial purposes shall be guilty of the offence of 'trafficking' and shall be punished with simple imprisonment which may extend to one year and shall also be liable for a fine which may extend to Rs 10 lakh," read the draft bill. "Any person who is part of an organised crime syndicate shall be punished with simple imprisonment which may extend to four years. —*PTI*